CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND FORTY-NINTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 3 September 1996, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Dembinski (Poland)

GE.96-63765 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 749th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I have on my list of speakers for today the representative of Algeria. I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria, Ambassador Meghlaoui, who will be speaking in his capacity as Special Coordinator for the review of the agenda.

Mr. MEGHLAOUI (Algeria) (translated from French): Mr. President, first of all I would like to congratulate you on taking the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament, whose destiny you will guide until the end of the year. I wish you good luck and assure you of the full support of the Algerian delegation.

I have asked to take the floor to present a report on the status of the consultations which I have conducted on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament. The report reads as follows.

At the beginning of the 1996 session, more specifically at the 721st plenary meeting of the CD, which took place on 23 January, I was appointed Special Coordinator "to consult on the review of the future agenda of the Conference as well as on organizational arrangements to deal with the following issues: the prohibition of the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices; effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons; prevention of an arms race in outer space; and transparency in armaments".

At the same plenary session the CD also adopted the following agenda for the 1996 session:

1. Nuclear test ban.

2. Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament.

3. Prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters.

4. Prevention of an arms race in outer space.

5. Effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

6. New types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons; radiological weapons.

7. Comprehensive programme of disarmament.

8. Transparency in armaments.

(Mr. Meghlaoui, Algeria)

9. Consideration and adoption of the annual report and any other report, as appropriate, to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Finally, on the same occasion, the President referred to the question of nuclear disarmament and said the following:

> "With regard to nuclear disarmament, one group reiterated the importance it attached to this issue and requested that an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament be established immediately. This view was shared by another delegation. Some delegations from another group expressed willingness to agree to the appointment of a special coordinator to deal with the issue of nuclear disarmament. Another group supported the idea that the President of the Conference, or a special coordinator to be appointed by him, would consult on how to address all the other items on the agenda, including nuclear disarmament. I intend to conduct intensive consultations with a view to developing a basis for consensus on this issue and to report to the Conference at the earliest opportunity."

In accordance with the mandate you gave me and bearing in mind the agenda as well as the President's statement which I have just quoted, I have held bilateral consultations with all delegations of CD member States. I also had a meeting with the delegations of the 23 non-member States which have since been admitted as members of this organ following its expansion on 17 June 1996. I noted great openness among those delegations, who seemed to me to be aware of the importance of revising the agenda and to recognize the need to do so. The results of those consultations were given to you on 23 May 1996 during a session of informal open-ended consultations at which I listened with great interest to the pertinent reactions of many delegations which encouraged me to continue my work.

Since then I have continued my patient and steadfast efforts to gather contributions to assist me in accomplishing my mission. Statements made by delegations on various occasions as well as informal talks with heads of delegation have enabled me to pin down individual concerns more precisely. I also have had informal meetings with the various groups making up the CD over the last month. I would have liked to have more time to organize other sessions of informal open-ended consultations. This was not possible: the negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty have taken up the bulk, if not all, of the CD's attention during the 1996 session. They became very intense towards the end of the first half of the year, which is when the consultations on the question of the agenda should have been stepped up. Delegations invested all their energy in those negotiations, which were lengthy and went beyond the deadline of 28 June set by the CD. These developments, expected or not, resulted in a deterioration in the working atmosphere which made it even more difficult to reach any compromise on the future agenda and institutional arrangements to be established to address the issues included in the mandate.

(Mr. Meghlaoui, Algeria)

In view of the foregoing, it seems to me that it is neither possible nor appropriate at this stage to draw conclusions or to make formal proposals. Nevertheless, I would venture to set out some general considerations before moving to more specific issues.

With regard to general considerations, first I can say that it is accepted that the CD should have a new, balanced agenda which can boldly reflect the changes that have taken place in the world over the last few years. However, rather large differences remain between the priorities expressed by the various groups. Secondly, I can also say that it is accepted that the future agenda should include specific items that can be addressed in negotiations aimed at the conclusion of universal agreements. In this regard the following arguments were put forward: the nature of the CD, which as a negotiating body should not duplicate the First Committee of the General Assembly or the United Nations Disarmament Commission; the shortage of financial resources in the United Nations and the need to use them more wisely; and the human resources constraint which prevents many delegations from coping with a heavy workload.

With regard to specific points, I would mention two: nuclear disarmament and conventional disarmament. The question of nuclear disarmament is at the heart of the concerns of many delegations. As we know, at least one group has reaffirmed the importance it attaches to this issue on many occasions. It calls for the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament as a matter of priority. We also know that the President of the CD is continuing his consultations. As far as I am concerned, I will limit myself to referring to the possibility of opening negotiations on a convention prohibiting the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, on which the attention of virtually all delegations seems to be focusing. Many of them consider that the CD should take up this issue as a matter of priority. Several others have a different view.

To be more specific, allow me to remind you of what I said at the end of the first round of consultations on 23 May 1996: no delegation is opposed to negotiating such a convention, but the difficulties encountered since the presentation of Ambassador Shannon's report remain. I did not fail to point out that, although some delegations considered and still consider that this is a priority matter, or at least that it is ripe for immediate negotiations, other delegations expressed reservations and sought prior clarification of the question of nuclear disarmament as a whole.

I strongly suspect that the difficulties we are already experiencing have worsened because of the turn taken by the CTBT negotiations. Further consultations are necessary and should take place in a calmer atmosphere than that presently prevailing in the CD. I do not think I am sticking my neck out if I say that the search for a solution to these questions is at this stage a prerequisite for a possible compromise on a future agenda or on organizational arrangements to be established to deal with the four points indicated in the mandate which was given to me.

(Mr. Meqhlaoui, Algeria)

Secondly, as I indicated in my preliminary comments on 23 May 1996, the replacement of "transparency in armaments" by a broader item, in other words, "conventional disarmament", would be a practical possibility if overall balance in the agenda were achieved. It would remain to identify what should be put into that basket. Several ideas have been put forward. I passed them on to you on 23 May 1996. I think I can add that the idea of approaching the question of "transparency in armaments" in the context of United Nations General Assembly resolution 46/36 L should be abandoned and if necessary a new mandate should be negotiated. Lastly, I think I can say that the question of land-mines has become more and more important as the consultations have proceeded, especially after the results of the Conference to review the United Nations Convention of 1980 became known.

In conclusion, I would paraphrase Balzac by saying that it will take a lot of genius to cut the Gordian knots which refuse to be untied. And I would venture to make three suggestions. The first concerns the consultations. As my Government has called me to other duties, I will soon be leaving Geneva and will not be able to continue them during the inter-sessional period. I suggest that the CD should entrust this difficult task to its President. I am convinced that Ambassador Dembinski has great experience and that he fully deserves our confidence.

The second suggestion is designed to help find a way of getting the CD's work going again at the beginning of the next session. Opening negotiations on land-mines could be contemplated. The conclusion of a convention is ardently desired by several member and non-member States of the CD as well as by many intergovernmental and non-governmental humanitarian organizations. The opening of such negotiations would enable our body to restore its image, which has been somewhat tarnished, leave enough time for further consultations on the agenda and reduce the temperature which has been too high for several months. I believe this suggestion is all the more worthy of interest because it will be difficult to reach consensus on the agenda in an atmosphere which is anything but calm. Furthermore, I am inclined to say that the question of the future agenda can be regarded as a legislative matter. The CD should not rule out the possibility of entrusting it, if necessary, to the United Nations General Assembly. As for organizational arrangements to be established to consider the issues covered by the mandate which you gave me, it is well known that the establishment or re-establishment of certain committees continues to run up against the same difficulties which are so familiar to us - in some cases since the 1994 session.

The third suggestion concerns the CD's rules of procedure. In this regard I would remind you of section VIII, and specifically articles 27, 28 and 29. In 1993, 1994 and 1995 the CD resorted to statements by the President in order to adopt its agenda. This formula offers the necessary flexibility which this institution needs at this point.

That is the end of my report on the consultations relating to the agenda of the CD. I would like to add a few words.

(Mr. Meghlaoui, Algeria)

As I have just said in presenting my report, I will soon be leaving Geneva. This is the last time I will be speaking in the Conference on Disarmament. Allow me therefore to stray from the beaten track to give you my impressions of the experience that I have had over the last three years in this Council chamber where, when I first entered this room, I was struck by the inscription above the entrance: "Here is a great work for peace in which all can participate" - "The nations must disarm or perish" - "Be just and fear not" (Robert Cecil). "The nations must disarm or perish" - a cold phrase which I have always taken as an invitation, not an order. In it you can see the expression of a reality which must be considered and confronted or an ideal to be achieved. Over the years, listening to the many statements by various delegations, I have often thought of Bergson, who talked about the "ancient conflict between realism and idealism". When realism means common sense or a proper appreciation of reality, it can be praiseworthy. When it is synonymous with pragmatism, it is still acceptable. When it leads to opportunism it poses problems, because, contrary to what was said by Gambetta, this barbarism does not conceal a genuine policy. And when realism becomes cynicism, it is not acceptable and can only be condemned. So is it better to be idealistic? According to Romain Rolland, "every people has its lie, which it calls idealism", while Flaubert believed that happiness was a lie. In my view you cannot associate idealism and lies in a forum like this one. Lies are the opposite of truth, and are knowingly designed to mislead. Idealism contains a very powerful dimension - the improvement of mankind. Realism and idealism rub shoulders in the CD. These apparently antagonistic extremes can combine to make this body an instrument in the service of human welfare and progress.

Among the major problems under consideration in the United Nations system, that of disarmament occupies a special place in the sense that it has to do with international peace and security, without which mankind cannot create the living conditions to which it aspires. We need a CD which can work effectively to achieve the objectives assigned to it by the international community. This body should offer a forum for negotiation among equal partners who, while representing different interests and sensibilities, are at the same time aware of the common future of the great human family. There is no way in which the CD can be useful by changing itself into a forum for confrontation crudely reflecting relations based on force. The CD's task is difficult, practically impossible. But for mankind the stakes are enormous. We do not have the right to allow ourselves to be discouraged, to give way to disillusionment. We have no choice but to move forward.

I cannot conclude my statement without thanking all my colleagues and those who have worked with them. Over a period of three years I have had a very enriching interaction with them. I will be leaving Geneva richer than when I came. I am grateful to them for that. I also thank Mr. Petrovsky, Mr. Bensmail and all the members of the secretariat, who gave me all the assistance I needed every time that I needed it. Last but not least, I turn to the interpreters. I would like to thank them warmly and at the same time apologize to them: I am aware that I have sometimes caused them trouble in translating my words. It is not always easy to reproduce the ideas of someone who thinks in Arabic and speaks in French.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank Ambassador Meghlaoui for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium, Ambassador Guillaume.

Baron GUILLAUME (Belgium) (translated from French): Straight away I would like to reassure those who suffer an involuntary reaction of anxiety when I take the floor at the end of a meeting. This time my intention is not to make a surprise announcement - clever legal footwork according to some, or a dirty trick according to others. No, I have taken the floor today because this is the last opportunity that I will have before the Conference on Disarmament, before all of my colleagues. Tomorrow most of them are going to fly off to New York, and when they come back 10 days from now I will have left Geneva. Therefore I would like to take this last opportunity to tell everyone how much I have enjoyed working in this assembly.

First of all, the issues that we have had to deal with were fabulous, and I must say that in all my career I have never negotiated so much. First of all in the CD, where I had hardly arrived in my first year when you did me the honour of asking me to chair the Ad Hoc Committee on security assurances. There I was on a steep learning curve and I did not have an easy time, but the friendship that everyone showed me made it a fascinating experience. And then there were the CTBT negotiations over the last 30 months, where my country, with its modest means, tried to make a positive contribution to this common effort. But it was not just the CD, and the same figures often met in other forums: in the First Committee, the biological negotiations, the negotiations on land-mines, not to mention the most important, the negotiations on the extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The issues being negotiated were fascinating, the subject-matter was difficult and the timetable was much too heavy for a delegation like ours, but that enabled us to devote ourselves to the full for three years.

Something else that made this work fascinating, aside from the interest of the subjects themselves, was the quality of the negotiators. I will not of course mention any names here, but it was a revelation for me to discover the intellectual quality of those around the table in this room. In a celebrated witticism Courteline said that after having met Mr. X and exchanged a few ideas, he felt like a fool. Here it was the contrary. I was always amazed at the intellectual riches that I encountered, and it was I who benefited from the exchange. Certainly that made for formidable negotiators, but it was a pleasure to cross swords with them.

Above and beyond the work itself and our life which I would describe as incestuous because of the extent to which we form part of the same family working for disarmament, these men and women have qualities, knowledge and influence which I was happy to be able to benefit from. As I take leave of this assembly, I would once more like to thank each individual, not only for what he or she has done for me, what he or she has done for the great cause which this Conference serves, but also what he or she is and everything that he or she contributes through the mere fact of existing.

(Baron Guillaume, Belgium)

Just as I take leave of my colleagues, I also take leave of the Conference itself and all those who contribute to making it what it is. Here too I do not wish to mention any names, and I would ask its Secretary-General to convey to all, from the smallest to the greatest, from the visible to the invisible, from those we see to those we hear, my tremendous gratitude for all the assistance I have received over these last three years.

Ms. FERGUSON (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): I have asked for the floor as Coordinator of the Western Group to say that we have listened with interest to the report just made by the distinguished Ambassador of Algeria in his capacity as Special Coordinator. The Group will wish to consider carefully what Ambassador Meghlaoui has said and may wish to comment further. In this case, we would wish to reserve the right to have any such comments reflected in the annual report.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished representative of the United Kingdom. I see no other speakers. As we have just heard, Ambassador Meghlaoui will be leaving us soon. I am sure I speak on behalf of all of us when I extend to him our sincere gratitude for the untiring efforts he has exerted in moving forward the thorny issue of the review of the agenda of the Conference. Ambassador Meghlaoui has represented his Government with distinction and efficiency. I am sure we will all miss him and I should like to take this opportunity to extend to him and his family our very best wishes for the future. I also understand that other colleagues will be leaving us soon. We have just heard that Ambassador Guillaume, Ambassador Starr of Australia and Ambassador Hoffmann of Germany will also be leaving us soon. On behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, I should like to place on record our deep appreciation for their outstanding contributions to our common endeavours and wish them, and their families, all the best for the future.

The secretariat has circulated, at my request, a timetable of meetings for next week, which is, as usual, subject to change if necessary. On this understanding, may I take it that the Conference agrees to this timetable?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: As I mentioned to you at our last plenary meeting, we shall hold an informal plenary meeting in order to start the consideration of the draft annual report of the Conference to the United Nations General Assembly, which has been distributed to you in document CD/WP.478. I intend to start this informal plenary meeting in half-an-hour's time after the inauguration ceremony which is about to take place outside the Council chamber shortly to mark the donation to the United Nations of a sculpture by the German artist, Clemens Weiss, and to which I understand you are all invited.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 12 September 1996 at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.